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ABSTRACT

The real impact of cinema consists in its ability to translate symbols, the mind's form of language, into dynamic moving images. Man's visual orientation produces both his positive reaction to motion--a key element in cinema--and his perceptions of coded, visual information--symbols. The complex relationship between symbols and rhythmic motion which can be effected in cinema are apparent in "Horseopera," a collage film using footage from old western films. This collage combines the two separate areas of imprinted information disseminated among humanity, the symbol information, and the rhythmic sense which are inherent within mankind. (JM)

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50th ANNIVERSARY

1924-1974

Le BALLET MECANIQUE

CINEMA AND SYMBOLS

by

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This essay has been written to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Fernand Leger's production of the film "Le Ballet Mecanique". It is in "Le Ballet Mecanique" that the first loop appears, in an avant-garde film.[4]

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Today the cinema as it is understood and appreciated by the majority of people is a form of entertainment in which stories are told. The narrative film dominates the field. The heritage of D. W. Griffith (wonderful as it is) the best of all possible forms of cinema? has stunted the growth of other forms of cinema. It is as if opera were the only form of music.

Cinema inherently has the ability to express human emotion in a better and more profound way than any written work And even when a narrative is , so to speak, put on screen and played out theatrically, it is not being used in a way that brings about the real potential power of cinema, the power to change people's minds and to persuade, not only as a surface reflection of the original written work. I feel the real power of the cinema lies with the fact that it has the ability to translate symbols into dynamic moving dreamlike images.

Symbols are more than emblems such as the cross, stars, or the swastika. Symbols are the mind's own form of language. A picture language in which a dove means peace. J.E. Cirlot, in his introduction to his dictionary of symbols[3] quotes the Hindu philosopher Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, "symbolism is the art of thinking in images". Cirlot's introduction brings the symbol into focus. He gives definitions and relates the subject to the work of C.G. Jung and Marcus Schneider as well as others.

Cirlot also gave a concise analysis of the symbol.

> "The basic idea and supposition which allow us to conceive of 'symbolism,' together with the creation and vitality of each symbol, are the following:
>
> (a) Nothing is meaningless or neutral; everything is significant. (b) Nothing is independent, everything is in some way related to something else. (c) The quantitative becomes the qualitative in certain essentials which, in fact, precisely constitute the meaning of the quantity. (d) Everything is serial. (e) Series are related one to another as to position, and the components of each series are related as to meaning."

The above propositions lead me to connect various thoughts I have had about cinema and symbols, which first took form when I became acquainted with the work of C. G. Jung.

Carl G. Jung in his book "Man and His Symbols"[7] gives an illustration of the number 13 as a symbol. He clearly demonstrates what he means by the term archetype in relation to symbols, when he says, "They are, (here Jung refers to archetypes that are symbols) at the same time both <u>images</u> and <u>emotions.</u> One can speak of archetypes only when those two aspects are simultaneous. When there is merely the image, then there is simply a word--picture of little consequence. But by being charged with emotion the image gains numinosity (or psychic energy); It becomes dynamic, and consequences of some kind must flow from it." Jung's insights into human psychology and symbolism, including his concept of the collective unconscious, provide the foundation upon which some of the ideas I will express are based.

It was Cirlot's references to the work of Marius Schneider which gave me further insights into the connection between cinema and symbols. Marious Schneider put forward the concept of "common rhythm" which he defined as follows:

> "The definition of common rhythm varies considerably according to the culture in question. Primitive beings found related rhythms particularly in the timbre of the voice, the rhythm of walking, motion, color and material. More advanced cultures preserve these criteria, but they give more importance to form and material (the visual) than to the criteria of the voice and the rhythm of walking. Instead of conceiving these related rhythms dynamically and artistically as primitive people did, higher cultures think of them as abstract values and order them according to a reason classification of a static and geometric kind....Whereas Primitive Man saw that forms and phenomena are essentially fluid, more advanced civilization have given pride of place to the static aspect of forms and a purely geometric outline of shape."

Cirlot states that Schneider's "common rhythm" is not "perceptible order in time" such as in music but a way of relating disparate phenomena which have a psychic connection. Cirlot then quotes Schneider:

> "Every symbol is a rhythmic whole embracing the essential, common rhythms of a series of phenomena, which are scattered over different planes by virtue of their secondary rhythms. They spread out from a spiritual centre and their clarity and intensity decrease as they approach the periphery. The reality of the symbol is founded upon the idea that the ultimate reality of an object lies in its spiritual rhythm - which it incarnates - and not in its material aspect."

Jung is referred to as amplifying the psychological implications between rhythm and emotion.

I think tnat Schneider's common rhythm concept may be

valid. I also believe that elements which make up a common rhythm can be used in rhythmic alterations that is in "perceptible order in time" in cinema.

Rhythm is a basic component of cinema, almost as basic as light. Paul Rotha, in his book "The Film Till now"[9], written in 1929, said "A film is primarily a dynamic pattern of rhythm (achieved by the editing and cutting) imposed on nature (the material taken, preferably the reality). It is governed pictorially by the use of light and movement in the creation of visual images, and mentally by psychology in the creation of mental images. Music and synchronized sound, used in counterpoint and contrapuntally, heighten the emotions of the spectator aurally and subconsciously. This dynamic mental pictorialism is, I claim, the most powerful form of expression available today to a creative artist. Raymond Spottiswoode wrote in "A Grammar of the Film" [10] that "rhythmical montage makes a powerful sensuous appeal, awaking primitive passions and activities" and Robert Gessner in his book, "The Moving Image"[6] said "Men through the ages think generally of time in terms of past, present, and future. Men see objects or space, similarly as movement and lights that activate those objects or that space--a painting has a life because it has captured a fraction of time, frozen a moment in luminosity. Nor can feelings and thoughts exit in cinema without the rhythms of movement and lights. Objects by themselves, animate or inanimate, have no

cinematic vitality otherwise; a still photograph has a true but limited reality. Vitality springs more likely from rhythmic alterations."

Both Spottiswoode and Gessner in their books have explored fundamental concepts of cinema from different points of view. They have advanced complex ideas which involve among other things the content of the image and movement in the shot as well as definitions of cinematic terms.

I will now discuss some of the relationships that exist between rhythm in cinema and symbols. First by going over what we know, as well as what we suspect about the perception of motion, then by setting forth a theory which assumes there is a relationship between rhythm and symbols, which I call "Rhythmic Symbolism".

THE PERCEPTION OF MOTION

Harry Asher[1] divides the process of vision into three parts, they are:

(1) Formation of the retinal image.

(2) Transformation of this retinal image into electrical and chemical impulses in the brain cells.

(3) The generation of conscious sensation.

It is the third area that I am primarily concerned with. Of course, the whole process is interrelated and this should be kept in mind.

Motion is one of the key elements in cinema. I believe one of the reasons for this is that recognition of motion is built into the human psyche as an imprint.

Jacques Monod in his book, "Chance and Necessity"[8] gives what I consider support and or confirmation to Jung's ideas of the archetype and the collective unconscious. He said:

> "An understanding of the central nervous system's functioning must begin with that of the synapse, its primary logical element. Investigation is easier here than at any other level, and refined techniques have yielded a considerable mass of findings. However, we are still a long way from an interpretation of synaptic transmission in terms of molecular interaction. Yet that is a most essential question, for therein probably lies the ultimate secret of memory. Quite some time ago it was proposed that the memory trace is registered in the form of a more or less irreversible alteration of the molecular interactions responsible for transmitting the nerve impulse through synapses. This theory has plausibility in its favor but no direct proofs."

A little further on in the essay Monod speculates on "mental reflection at the deeper level" and he says, "The significance of the simulated experience comes clear, but only when it has been enunciated symbolically." Yes indeed, the mind's moving images come clear and as Jung says, "charged with emotion", Jung claims the mind has a history behind it, the biological, prehistoric and unconscious development of archaic man. Monod states "<u>confirmed by concrete experience</u> that the power of simulation ledged in our early ancestors central nervous system was propelled to the level reached with Homo Sapiens. The subjective simulator could afford to make no

mistakes when organizing a panther hunt with the weapons available to Australanthropus, Pithecanthropus or even Homo Sapiens of Cro--Magnon times." Granting that Mondod is probably right, one can discern the beginnings of evidence that substantiate Jung's theories and if one looks at a simplified example: (some primitive men are out walking or hunting for food. They hope to catch some animal, anything from an antelope to a rabbit, as they walk they look very carefully around and on the horizon, their attention is drawn to a shape that moved, - it was the movement which drew them to look in a particular direction. Thousands of years of conditioning have made man visually wary. Hundreds of thousands of years before man had any music, visual impressions were already imprinted within him.

Once the primitive men have noticed a movement they are very concerned about what made that movement. Is it an animal? An animal they can chase, catch, kill and eat? Or is it something that will chase and eat them? The awareness of motion can be very keen if your life depends on it! Also identifying the movement with a tiger, bear or other animals brings up the aspect of the devouring monster which is within all of us.)

At another point in his book[8] Monod refers to an electrophysiological investigation which proves that a frog is excited only by a moving image. I feel this piece of information can be related to the work of Dietrich Magnus[5] the entomologist, who, following earlier work by Niko Tinbergen, demonstrated that

the Silver-Washed fritillary (a butterfly) was attracted by several factors, two of which were movement and size. Essentially a super female butterfly (Paper Dummy) four times life size moving its wings faster than possible in real life was what most attracted the male butterfly. I think this gives us one more clue, as to what is taking place when a voluptuous female movie star is projected many times larger than life on screen (super-reality), especially if she is also doing fast movements or gyrations. This also is a good example of how content (of the shot - which may be defined[11 & 6] as the view or scene taken by a camera, its duration in time determined by editing) is somehow related to visual perception, because it may be imprinted on the collective unconscious. It is possible that throughout the delicate but intricate and complex system of life we know, in molecules such as DNA, coded information such as visual imprints exist. This would be very basic coded information passed on from generation to generation, which we all share as the collective unconscious. The examples of the frogs and the butterflies may very well point the way to understanding man's own actions.

The perception of motion as conscious sensation can be said to include the activation of certain imprinted, coded visual information as part of a total process within an organized system, commonly called the human body. Also knowledge of the way in which symbols are a part of this picture is of special value to artists because of the link between the conscious and unconscious mind.

CINEMA AND MOTION

The short history of cinema will be put into perspective if it is viewed in the context of man's endeavors in the arts when seen as an interrelated epic acted out over a long period of time. The arts reflect the world in which they exist, not just the world of fashion, but the actual physical and biological world.

An example of this is that in this century man's view of the world has changed because with the airplane and the view of the land from the air, a new overall view was observed and absorbed by artists. This is still going on but now it is the view of the Earth from the Moon, which has changed the physical look of the world.

The system that is the human body in which blood flows; the heart beats, and the mind thinks, is our personal part of a world in which the sun rises and sets year after year and innumerable repeated actions take place again and again. The arts mirror this repetition, found in life and this repetition is often expressed in a rhythmic form.

Repetition as rhythm is very common in music and dance. The arts of painting and design also have many examples of repetition. In commercial art, rugs, wall paper, and material (plaid) repetition is found in abundance, it is all around us. There are primitive cave drawings which strive to show animals in motion by the use of repetition. Many examples of the use of repetition can be found in painting, such as the Van Gogh land-

scape of a wheat field, where the wheat seems to wave in the wind.

The Futurists[12] tried to consciously incorporate and use motion and dynamism in their art; Balla's paintings "Leash in Motion" and "Rhythm of the Violinist" show a use of repetition to stimulate motion.

The representational or pictorial arts entered a new era with cinema. Cinema added time as well as motion to the pictorial elements the artist had at his disposal and with sound, all the qualities of music and dance were now possible in pictures. What is apparent here is that repetition or rhythm and motion as represented pictorially have come together.

Let us now consider what motion or movement in the cinema is. Man's attempt to capture reality or life, led at the end of the 19th century to the invention of various machines, which took advantage of a physical limitation (the persistence of vision) to create the illusion of motion out of many still pictures. This illusion is still the basis of cinema today and the electronic television image is a technical variation of this, taking advantage of the same physical facts.

A definition of movement in cinema should contain all the many possibilities that exist. Paul Rotha tried to define or outline four movements in cinema in his book "The Film Till Now"[9]. He said:

> "When it is said that the visual images from which a film is built are light revealed by moving form, it is perhaps wise to qualify this statement. It is clear

that there are at least four different movements present in the cinema, each of which has a definite bearing on the construction and preconception of a film. These may be said to be:

1 The actual movements of people, animals and things (such as trains, motor-cars, trees, lifts, shadows, clouds, smoke, waves), being the movements of the material photographed in a single shot and which are the elements of the pictorial composition of the visual image on the screen.

2 The movement or mobility of the camera itself, being such movements as panning, traveling, and crane shots.

3 The movement existing through time and space between one visual image and the succeeding one in the progression of shots on the screen, by which may be understood the term continuity of fluidity of the development of the thematic narrative. This may alternatively be called the theory of intervals between one frame of film and another in direct cutting; giving rise to varying reactions from sudden shock to smooth transfusion in the spectator. By this means of assembling or mounting is the complete film composition constructed.

4 The movement of the screen itself, as has been publicly seen in the magnascope, or enlarged screen, and in the tripytch, which is the ordinary central screen with a flanking screen on either side."

To this I would add a fifth movement; a movement in three dimensional space.

Rotha's movement of material #1 and movement of the camera #2 would be the raw material, once recorded, which would be used in what essentially be editing in his 3rd movement, that of time and space. It is in this movement in time, that rhythmic structure becomes possible. Also, if the material one used consisted of

images of a symbolic nature, the further possibilities of combining rhythms and symbols are apparent.

Rhythmic structure can be achieved in cinema by using loops. A loop in cinema is a shot which has been reproduced so that it can be used more than once or repeated a number of times. The following example from my film "Horseopera" will show a practical application of this idea.

"Horseopera" is a collage film using footage from old western films put into a new form. I chose shots which I knew had a symbolic meaning: such as the cowboy hero wearing a white hat and two six guns; the villainous bad guy wearing a black hat; a fist fight confrontation between a good guy and a bad guy. The struggle between good and evil is woven throughout the film and in this sequence a gun fight sets the theme which is reinforced in a different key by a fist fight.

GUN FIGHT, SEQUENCE SHOTS BY LETTER AND NUMBER

The number of the shot is its location in time or literal sequential order in the film. The letter refers to the shot itself and the same letter (B & B) is the exact same shot except as noted.

Shot #	Shot Letter	
1	A	C.U. Man in Mexican hat, he turns frame freezes
2	B	M.C.U. Cowboy (Wm.S. Hart) he has a white hat on
3	C	M.S. The villain and his men, in barroom he is being told the hero is coming
4	B	M.C.U. Cowboy walks out of frame
5	C	M.S. The villain gets his gun out and hides behind bar
6	D	M.S. Cowboy at door of bar with guns drawn
7	E	C.U. Villain behind bar
8	D	M.S. Cowboy
9	DD	L.S. Cowboy
10	E	C.U. Villain behind bar
11	DE	L.S. Shot D has E as background as door opens, cowboy shoots villain
12	F	C.U. Cowboy with gun inside bar
13	DE	M.S. Dance hall girls go past cowboy as they leave
14	G	M.S. Cowboy shoots kerosene lamp down, starts fire
15)	H)	M.S. Entrance of Bronco Billy as hero
15)	I)	M.L.S. Fist fight (multiple super imposition)
16	A	Same as above except no freeze frame
17	B	Same as above
18	C	Same as above (Shots 16 thru 19 are done with new
19	D	variations such as stills of the villain, the fist fight loop and the entrance of Bronco Billy)

In the above example the gun fight sequence or stanza which is repeated with variations, is preceded by the shot in which the man in shot A makes an entrance. This is a nonrecurring shot. That is, it is not used as a loop. This shot is used to separate the first sequence of the film which is from the first western, "The Great Train Robbery." This first sequence is used to evoke the moods of a new mythology.

Shot A when it first appeared, is in opposite screen direction. I then jump cut to reverse direction and then the shot becomes a freeze frame. The next time shot A appears at #16, it is shorter and there is no freeze frame, as the second reiteration of this sequence proceeds with shots B, C, D, etc. I made variations, some of which are freeze frames or stills, of the villian in shot C, a super of the fist fight loop and also of Bronco Billy's entrance.

The first fight loop is a fight between good and evil on a basic level and is set against the gun fight which is the same thing in modern dress. This loop is a very primitive , and therefore, primary picturization of confrontation and force and is a symbolic image with Jungian overtones.

Shots A,B, and C etc., were reproduced in the lab as loops. Then by editing, I put them in rhythmic structure. More than that, I have symbolic images in dynamic motion. The above example is given to show that a complex relationship between image or symbol and rhythm or motion can be brought about in cinema.

THE THEORY OF RHYTHMIC SYMBOLISM

WHY A SYMBOL USED AS A LOOP PUT IN RHYTHM STRUCTURE IS POWERFUL

Given the possibility that symbols are imprinted on the human mind and the actuality of human visual recognition or perception (as described above in various examples) add to these repetition with its many variations and a concept of visual perception in cinema emerges which I call "RHYTHMIC SYMBOLISM".

Essentially rhythmic symbolism is the idea of using a key shot (see definition of shot), a symbolic shot and putting that shot in rhythmic formation (using loops) in time and space. Both the shot and the rhythm have the possibility of an infinite variety of combinations as to how they are physically used, edited, printed, rerecorded, etc., as well as the limitless possibilities inherent in the content of the shot.

Flags are archetypal symbols. If one had footage with various shots the content of which was flags, one could put these shots in a rhythmic structure by editing. The flag symbols, when presented on screen in a rhythmic form (if put together by someone with talent), take on higher values and their cinematic influence is more keenly felt than any one shot of a flag would be by itself. Add to this super-real qualities of the larger than life image on big screens and you have a mechanism which can unleash psychic energy from the unconscious mind.

Therefore I feel we are dealing with two separate areas of imprinted information, coded and collectively disseminated among all humanity. One is that there are symbols or symbol information which we carry within us. The other is that there is a rhythm or time sense which we also carry within us as an imprint.

The rhythm or time sense may or may not be related to man's feeling for music and dance. My guess is that it is, and that this is also related to the excitement which can be built up in dances.

It seems to me, that when these two aspects of our make-up are played upon, the result will be a release of psychic energy. In cinema a shot with a particular symbol will activate a switch in the mind. If that same shot is used in a rhythm structure the power of the symbol will be multiplied and amplified. Rhythm structure can bring about a revelation of the inner meaning of the symbol. This revelation will be cerebrally charged and in turn will bring about a powerful emotional reaction.

CONCLUSION

There are students of cinema and theoreticians who have tried to work out systems and codify information concerning the many aspects of cinema. Sergei Einsenstein was both a great artist and theoretician. His ideas, and those of

Lev Kuleshov about montage form part of the background for my theory of rhythmic symbolism. The film critic, Andre Bazin, said, "the meaning is not in the image, it is in the shadow of the image projected by montage on to the field of consciousness of the spector."

Cinema is still at the beginning of its history when compared to music and the other arts. Cinema has not yet found itself. At this time there are those who work in video and do not think of it as cinema. Video is cinema. In fact, cinema is all "moving image media" and cinema is the art of manipulating moving images in time and space.

To reiterate what I feel is most important in this essay, I have identified two areas which I believe can play a part in cinematic rhythmic structure. They are:

1) Shots used in or as loops; the content of which may be related to symbols or archetypes and be imprinted in or on the collective unconscious.
2) A rhythm or time sense which is imprinted within us and is or can be triggered by an archetype image perceived in motion or alterations.

There are many unanswered questions. Do the two imprints acting together induce action in a third or work in yet another form? Is a switch, so to speak, turned on in the mind of the viewers? If so, what turned that switch?

Visual perception is made up of many complex elements. Cinema, as it is perceived, has special qualities which must be taken into account. Hopefully this essay will point the way and stimulate serious work in the area I have outlined, because I feel cinema is the answer to man's dreams.

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